



January, 2007

Dear County Foster Parents and Relative Care Providers,

Throughout the year each of you generously provide care and support to the children in our foster care system. It is this selfless attitude that makes the foster system work. I thank you for this continued dedication as it is of the utmost importance. I have realized that the majority of training available is geared towards new foster parents being licensed or are foster child focused such as the Options for Recovery (OFR) Program. Although both types of training are extremely relevant, I felt that there was an even greater need that has not been addressed. It is my goal to offer you, the foster families; a special course designed to cover topics that are pertinent and that interest you.

My name is Holly Prieto and I am a social worker and the coordinator for the Options for Recovery Program in our county. This program provides reunification/mentoring services to children that are 60 months and younger and are drug affected. Being an OFR home requires additional training to learn how to mentor birth parents and deal with the emotional and physical difficulties that arise from drug use.

I have personally witnessed how hard foster/relative parents work and how many different roles they take on whether they are an OFR home or not. I am aware that foster parents have needs of their own which is why the "Foster Parent Academy" has been established. This special academy is a condensed version of what social workers spend over 100 hours in training learning. It has been reformatted and redirected to the needs and education of foster parents. I have contracted the program through CSU Fresno and will focus on issues that foster parents deal with. Some topics you can expect to see are working with birth parents, the effects of meth and working with your social worker.

This is a golden opportunity for all foster parents, however space is limited. Due to the interactive nature of the course, enrollment will be limited to 60 participants. This is an effort for all involved to get the most out of the sessions and allow time for discussion about what being a foster/relative parent is like. Due to limited availability, priority will be given to those who register for the entire academy. The academy starts in November 2006 and continues until May 2007. Exact dates are provided on this website.

I am very excited about the Foster Parent Academy and can't wait for you to meet the trainer. Her name is Jana Mathias and she will be joining us from Tulare County. She is a school-based social worker and a former child welfare worker. She has appeared in numerous interviews and on "48 Hours". She is a dynamic speaker and is able to provide tangible information to each foster parent. She encourages focusing on your needs as a foster parent and gaining a better understanding of your role in the life of a foster child.

As mentioned earlier, space is limited and registration is required. **Childcare will be provided on site at no charge.** Please let me know if you have any questions. Snacks will be provided at no cost, however lunch is on your own. A completion certificate will be awarded at the end of the academy. I look forward to seeing you there! Please call **(805) 788-2521** to register for the training and childcare.

Sincerely,

Holly Prieto
Social Worker III/OFR Coordinator